

Understanding Body Mass Index



Healthy
Arkansas

*For a Better
State of Health*

A Tool Kit for Parents

BMI Assessment: A Tool for Parents

The Problem

Facts:

- Obesity is becoming a major problem for our children.
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of children in the United States are now overweight.
- The number of overweight children increases each year.
- Results of the 2004 Body Mass Index (BMI) screenings show that 38% of Arkansas children could have a weight problem.
- Overweight children are more likely to develop diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.
- Overweight children are more likely to become overweight adults.

Causes of the problem:

- Not enough physical activity and/or exercise
- Too much fast food (high fat, high calorie, large portions)
- Too many sweets (high in calories, low in nutrients)



Helping Find Solutions: BMI Assessment

Body Mass Index (BMI) is:

- Determined using height, weight, age and sex. Girls and boys differ in their body fat and it changes as they grow. It is important to look at BMI each year.
- A screening tool. A high BMI does not always mean a child is overweight. For example, a muscular child can have a high BMI. A doctor can best determine if your child has a weight problem.
- Recommended for all children every year by the American Academy of Pediatrics, a group of doctors who care for children.



Body Mass Index (BMI) Assessment does not:

- Use calipers or cause pain
- Measure fat
- Compare children or adolescents
- Label children as obese

Body Mass Index (BMI) tells you:

- If your child is underweight, normal, at risk (for overweight) or overweight
- If your child is growing and developing in a healthy way

If the BMI letter you received showed your child “at risk” or “overweight,” you should consider visiting your doctor. It is important to remember that growth spurts and weight gain are part of growing up. Other factors, like family background and race, can affect your child’s weight and height. You should not put your child on a “diet” without talking to your doctor.

Some Questions You May Have

Is the measurement accurate?

The BMI measurement done in the schools is a screening. This single measurement of your child's BMI cannot tell the whole story. Talk to your doctor or other health professional about your child and his or her BMI. It is important to look at BMI each year as your child grows.

What is the difference between being “at risk” and “overweight?”

You should talk to a doctor or other health professional about the difference. And, your doctor should check your child if his or her BMI screening results are “at risk” or “overweight.”

What about the “underweight” child?

The BMI screening may also identify adolescents who are severely underweight. These children may be developing eating disorders. You should talk with a doctor to see if additional tests are needed and if your child needs additional help.

Can the BMI screening cause eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia?

There is no evidence that regular BMI screening can cause eating problems. Special care has been taken to keep the screening confidential and professional.

What if my child is really muscular?

BMI screening is a guide. An athletic child might be carrying a lot of weight as muscle. Muscle weighs more than body fat, so a higher BMI does not mean that they are overweight. Again, you should talk to your doctor.

What if my doctor isn't concerned?

Your doctor may not be concerned with your child's weight. As a parent, you can still help your child to improve his or her diet and physical activity for better health.

What are some things that I can do to help?

- Offer healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables and foods low in sugar and salt.
- Change from sodas to water, low-fat milk or low calorie drinks.
- Turn off the television when you eat.

- Have meals together, as a family.
- Limit television and computer time to two hours per day.
- Plan fun and vigorous exercise that involves the whole family.
- Model the behavior you want your child to have; set an example.



As a parent, are there other things I can do to help?

- Get involved in activities in your community to promote good nutrition and increase physical activity.
- Call your school superintendent and volunteer to serve on the local School Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee, required by Act 1220 of 2003.



Where can I go for more information?

For Parents:

Children's BMI Calculator: <http://www.bcm.edu/cnrc/bodycomp/bmiz2.html>

From the Baylor College of Medicine, USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center. Parents concerned about their child's weight can use this calculator to determine whether their child's weight is appropriate for his or her height.

Arkansas Center for Health Improvement Obesity Initiative (including links by county to dietitians, health educators and community resources):

http://www.achi.net/current_initiatives/obesity.asp

The purpose of these directories is to provide physicians with a list of resources to whom they may refer children and families for assistance with weight control. These directories may also be useful to nurses, school personnel and parents. If you don't have access to a computer, call 1-800-235-0002 and ask for a list of resources for your county.



American Dietary Guidelines:

www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/dga

This website contains information on the food guide pyramid, portion sizes, limiting fat, increasing fruits and vegetables and other information for consumers.

For Kids and Parents:

VERB: www.verbnow.com

The VERB campaign encourages young people ages 9-13 (tweens) to be physically active every day. This website includes resources and information to make regular physical activity "cool" for tweens and a fun thing to do.

Body and Mind: www.bam.gov

BAM! Body and Mind is an online destination for kids created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Designed for kids 9-13 years old, BAM! Body and Mind gives them the information they need to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Smart Mouth: www.Smart-Mouth.org

This site for kids from the Center for Science in the Public Interest includes information on fast foods, snacks, food industry, recipes and much more.



A blue-tinted photograph of a young child sliding down a wooden slide. The child is in the middle of the slide, with their arms outstretched and a joyful expression. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

Remember

- The BMI measurement being done in the schools is a screening.
- Monitoring your child's BMI should involve a doctor or other qualified health care professional.
- A child or teenager who has a high BMI may be overweight or could become overweight.
- You can improve your child's health by encouraging healthier food choices and regular physical activity.
- You can help by working with your school Nutrition and Physical Advisory Committee.
- If you don't have computer access, call 1-800-235-0002 and ask for the list of resources for your county.



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Governor Mike Huckabee